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Contemporary desegregation planning has been dominated by the use of magnet schools and the controlled choice process. This paper includes an examination of the organizing principles of magnet schools. Following the description of the architecture of the magnet schools themselves is a review of the organizing principles involved in the controlled choice process. The paper concludes with a review of the reasons for the attractiveness of the magnet school and controlled choice process in desegregation planning and a series of comments on the frequently cited criticisms of the magnet school plans. (Author)

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MAGNET SCHOOL DESEGREGATION PLANS:

Elements of the Architecture

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary desegregation planning has been dominated by the use of magnet schools and the controlled choice process. In this paper is included an examination of the organizing principles of magnet schools. Following the description of the architecture of the magnet schools themselves is a review of the organizing principles involved in the controlled choice process. The paper concludes with a review of the reasons for the attractiveness of the magnet school and controlled choice process in desegregation planning and a series of comments on the frequently cited criticisms of the magnet school plans.

MAGNET SCHOOL DESEGREGATION PLANS: ELEMENTS OF THE ARCHITECTURE

School desegregation designs have changed over the last twenty years. Desegregation plans are not simply the product of antiseptic social science, but also the result of art, politics, and compromise. The typical desegregation plan of the mid-1960s was a variation on the theme of mandatory reassignment. By contrast, the contemporary desegregation plan is typically a variation on the theme of educational variety and choice within a mandatory framework. "From a few schools in big-city districts a decade ago, the magnet school movement has expanded today to include more than 1,100 elementary and secondary schools in more than 130 urban school districts." (Blank, 1984, p. 270.)

The architectural building blocks of the desegregation plans of the mid-1960s were redistricting, pairing and clustering, and grade level reorganizations. They contrast markedly with the two building blocks of the contemporary desegregation plan - choice and variety. This is not to suggest that there weren't some infrequent representations of magnet schools and transfer assignment programs that allowed parent and student choice in the plans of the 1960s. Furthermore, mandatory reassignment provisions continue to pervade contemporary desegregation plans, and plans are still being proposed that are almost entirely built upon mandatory reassignment provisions. They, however, should be understood as contemporary anomalies.

There appears to be no watershed event separating the period of mandatory reassignment planning from the period of magnet school and choice planning. However, the time period beginning in 1976 marked the advent of a number of desegregation plans that relied heavily upon parent choice and which made extensive use of magnet schools (Milwaukee and Buffalo). In most cases these plans had mandatory reassignment provisions as "back-ups" to the magnet school choice process.

While desegregation plans employing magnet schools and parent choice dominate contemporary desegregation approaches, these plans do vary substantially in their approach to magnet schooling and the choice process. (Rossell, 1985, p. 8). It is often the case that these plans are developed under court-imposed directives and, consequently, there is often not the time for careful consideration of the architecture of the desegregation approach. Districts often act as if each wheel of the desegregation process has to be re-invented. It is sometimes the case that those responsible for the development of magnet school plans are not aware of the range of possibilities available to them and the values and consequences associated with the choices they make. Often they are not aware of problems of equity within plans and the experience of other districts in solving them. Consequently, there is not a sharing of information from other districts and consideration of the basic principles undergirding desegregation plans. What follows is an analysis of some of the organizing principles of magnet schools. These principles are expressed as polar opposites so that the range of potential response to these principles can be examined.

Organization Principles of Magnet Schools

1. Enrichment Versus Single Focus

One approach to the development of a magnet school is to consider the goal to be that of enriching all aspects of a traditional school program. In a sense this approach attempts to make the best possible school that available resources can buy. Because such a substantial amount of resource is being invested in the program, it is presumed that the program will be attractive to a wide range of students and, hence, meet the definition of a magnet school. By contrast, another approach to creating an attractive alternative is to develop a certain aspect of a school program and promote its features to a wide audience. Rather than attempting to enrich all aspects of the program, the school attempts to emphasize a single focus that makes the school distinctive. The primary emphasis in the development of single-focus magnet schools is to create an educationally different program. In this respect, then, the single focus is intended to appeal not to all students and parents, but rather to a limited number who support the single-focus program. However, the single focus is intended to be attractive enough to a sufficient number of parents that there will result a full enrollment into the school.

It is often the case that enrichment-type magnet programs exist in districts that have a very limited number of magnet school programs. Often these programs are entitled magnet schools without any further descriptions of the program. Moreover, their attractiveness is limited to such generic attributes as lower class size and additional support staff. Since

the ostensible goal of an enrichment magnet is to create a better school rather than a distinctive or different one, the enrichment magnet program is often the target of community critics, who cite the special considerations it has over the remainder of the district schools. By contrast, whether or not the single-focus magnet is considered a better program is more in the eyes of the beholder. Because enrichment magnets are both more expensive to develop and subject to invidious comparison with the remainder of the schools in the district, they are less commonly used as the organizing principle of magnet schooling. Also, with regard to the enrichment approach, the problem of diminishing returns arises. Because these programs are not distinctive, there arises the problem of what happens when more than one enrichment magnet is developed. By contrast, the single-focus approach theoretically continually taps a new segment of interest in the community aligned with the new program concept.

2. Content Versus Mode of Instruction Programs

Another organizing principle of magnet schools is the decision associated with creating a content versus mode of instruction specialization. Content specialization, as the name implies, is the magnet school approach which relies upon the distinctiveness of the content of the program in order to realize its goal. A specialization in the mode of instruction is concerned about teaching the familiar content in a different style or manner. Most often, mode of instruction specializations are developed at the elementary school level. For example, the language immersion

programs instruct students in the traditional elementary curriculum, but do so in the target language. A high school program that specializes in the medical professions is an example of the content specialization where the traditional comprehensive high school program has added to it the special medical content.

In considering choices among content and mode of instruction specialization, in addition to the grade level, it is also important for the architect to consider cost and marketing implications. Generally speaking, the content specialization will end up costing more than the mode of instruction specialization - for the simple reason that content specialization tends to add more to the standard curriculum, while the mode of instruction specialization tends to present the standard curriculum in a new form. Also, from a marketing standpoint it is frequently easier to represent the distinctive features of a content specialization than it is the distinctive features of a mode of instruction specialization. The public more readily understands the objective of a program content emphasis than such mode of instruction emphases as open education, fundamental education, language immersion, etc.

3. City-wide Versus Attendance Area Appeal

Sometimes the choice of a particular program approach to magnet schooling is suggested by the targeted population. In some cases, it may be that the targeted population will be those residing within a relatively short distance of the school, even though that population may not be attending the school. In this case, the program is designed and tailored to appeal

to this attendance area population and tries to attract a portion of them back to the public schools under this new design.

In other cases, those responsible for the design of the program have chosen a particular approach to the magnet program that has no direct appeal to the local attendance area population but rather is intended to attract parents and students from a much broader city-wide population. In this respect, the local program "plays against form" in the sense that it is not intended to have a direct appeal to most of the indigenous attendance area population.

The primary consideration in this program decision is the population that is to be attracted to the school and the recognition that the style and form of the program can play a significant role in that determination. (Rossell, 1985).

Since the approach to magnet planning often includes direct involvement of the communities affected by the magnet school decision, it is not unusual or unanticipated that community planning will result in a set of recommendations compatible with the interests of that local community.

If the decision in favor of a magnet school specialization emphasizes a city-wide perspective, it can be anticipated that there will be often severe disagreement between the local community interests and the city-wide

program interests. For example, it is not unusual for districts to decide to place a gifted and talented magnet program in a school housing a concentrated population of low-achieving students. The selection of this school to house a gifted and talented program would have the expected result of attracting students from many geographic areas represented in the community, but reducing the number of enrollees from the local attendance area. By contrast, the decision to locate a gifted and talented magnet program in a more socio-economically balanced or even a high SES area of the city might be based on the need to stabilize a school population or the need to attract back to the public schools a resident attendance area population. The important principle here is that certain program choices have likely student population targets, and this factor needs to be carefully and thoughtfully considered in the magnet school design.

4. Displacement Versus Non-Displacement

This distinction has to do with the effect of the magnet program decision on the resident population of the school. Some programs by their design and implementation can readily accommodate the existing attendance area population and other programs cannot. For example, the decision to implement a Montessori program in place of a traditional elementary school setting will have a displacement effect for two reasons. First of all, the program is significantly different from the existing program and, therefore, students without experience at a lower level of Montessori cannot be expected to gain much benefit from the upper level Montessori program. Secondly, the Montessori program is for this reason often

implemented developmentally. That is, the program starts off with a pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, and possibly first grade component (in Montessori parlance, the primary level), with a new grade of the program added each year as a new set of students comes into the first year of the primary level. By comparison, when a district decides to operate a "fundamental school" or to add a content specialization that does not require any prerequisites for admission, the resident population need not be displaced.

The effects of the choice of a displacement program can be mitigated by phase-out considerations. The existing program can be accommodated coterminously with the new magnet program and in that way maintain all or some of the original school population. For example, a gifted and talented program would be phased into a school while allowing the present program and students to remain until grade top.

5. Program Versus Whole School

Another basic decision in the design for magnet schools is one that differentiates between a program that is intended for a certain number of students with a school (school-within-a-school) versus a design that affects every student within the school. Program versus whole school design distinctions can be found at the elementary as well as the secondary level. However, it is more common to see whole school approaches at the elementary level and program approaches at the secondary level.

Occasionally this decision is influenced by the size of the school space. In a large elementary school, for example, the decision may be to operate a distinctive program within the school because the magnet program is not thought to be one which would attract a population sufficient to fill the entire school. It may also be the case that a program originally developed as a program within a school grows to the extent that it requires a whole school environment. For example, the performing arts program, originally developed in Milwaukee as a program within a comprehensive high school, expanded to the extent that an entire high school for the performing arts was ultimately required. The choice to develop a magnet program within a school or convert the entire school to the magnet program also has implications for the displacement effect of the program. Whole school approaches, because they potentially deal with the entire school population, are theoretically more effective in racial balancing. However, program-within-a-school approaches can involve enough students to have an appreciable effect on racial balance and often without the displacement effect on the attendance area students.

6. Entrance Criteria Versus Open Admission

This topic will be discussed later as we look at the different approaches to enrollment into magnet programs. However, at this point the issue is raised because of its relationship to magnet school programs. Certain programs have clear implications with regard to entrance criteria, while other programs are inherently more flexible. For example, gifted and talented programs most often have entrance criteria that affect which students are eligible for the program. Also, certain programs have

an earlier experience in the program as a prerequisite for enrollment. Language immersion programs and Montessori programs at the upper levels assume prior experience at an earlier level. Also, some programs are designed to be extensions of the program at an earlier school level. For example, experience at the elementary and junior high school in a creative or performing arts program might be considered a prerequisite for enrollment in a similarly designed high school program. Also, within the high school program, certain specializations at the 11th and 12th grade levels might require the completion of certain program prerequisites at the 9th or 10th grade level. All of these are examples of entrance criteria that govern the circumstances of access to specialized schools or programs.

Program choices for magnet schooling can also be made to insure the greatest opportunity for open admission. The choice of programs that have an opportunity to be chosen by individuals without special prior training or exposure insures the greatest amount of access to a magnet program or school. This program choice needs to be coupled with an enrollment philosophy that eliminates any unnecessary prerequisites to enrollment. For example, there are performing arts schools that admit on the basis of interest alone and others requiring auditions. In most cases, admission requirements have the effect of limiting minority enrollment to a program. Whatever the district's philosophy with regard to enrollment, the point being raised here is that program choice will in some cases dictate the admission policies of a magnet school or program.

7. Same Programs Versus Different Programs

In the overall architecture of the magnet school plan, it may be determined that the same kind of specialization (or a very limited number of specializations) will be replicated in schools designated as magnets, rather than multiple magnet opportunities being developed. Those who opt in favor of the development of a single or limited number of magnet programs do so usually on the basis of their belief that there are only a few outstanding magnet program concepts that will be effective. Also, the existence of waiting lists influences the choice to develop duplicate programs. Those who subscribe to a philosophy of development of a wide range of unique programs believe that they are tapping a different level of community interest with each program they develop. They also believe that those who are on a waiting list for a particular oversubscribed magnet program would nevertheless consider enrollment in a different program if it were available. This particular approach may seem contradictory to good planning, unless the planner takes into consideration that it is the concept of a magnet school rather than the particular program or content which is being chosen. Studies in Boston and elsewhere have revealed that parents frequently do not know the specialization of the magnet program their child is attending. While developing a new specialization has the potential of tapping a wider array of interest, it also runs the risk of establishing a program that is not sufficiently popular to fill the desired capacity of the program. Also, the failure to duplicate programs where heavy oversubscription exists is often criticized by the community.

8. Full-Time Versus Part-Time Program

Most magnet programs are designed in such a way as to accommodate students in the school or program on a full-time basis. However, some magnet school architects have intentionally designed programs to accommodate a part-time enrollment approach. In some cases, these programs are located at a center where only the specialty opportunities are available, and students must be enrolled in a comprehensive program elsewhere in order to have a complete program. In other cases, programs which are designed primarily to accommodate students on a full-time basis are nevertheless held open for part-time enrollment. It is usually the case under this latter alternative that many students who start out attending programs in a particular site on a part-time basis end up transferring on a full-time basis to eliminate the inconvenience of attendance at two separate buildings. Regardless of the enrollment philosophy of the district, there are certain programs that by their nature preclude a part-time enrollment approach. For example, most of the mode of instruction specializations are not designed to accommdoate students on a part-time basis. By contrast, a number of the content specialization programs can and do make this accommodation. Also, this decision is often related to grade level organization. Part-time programs are more frequently seen at the high school level, where students have more freedom and flexibility in terms of schedules and transportation.

9. Area of Weakness Versus Area of Strength

One approach to choosing an appropriate magnet program for a school is to build on the areas of strength in the existing program. The nation is replete with examples of magnet programs that are outgrowths and

improvements upon already strong features of a particular school program. For example, high schools with an outstanding music program and facilities can be efficiently converted to a performing arts magnet. On the other hand, there are also many magnet programs that were established without relationship to the existing program and in some cases actually were intended to strengthen perceived weaknesses of the existing school program. Sometimes the particular school space was a critical factor in the location of a program, or possibly the location of the school within a community was the important factor. On other occasions, the magnet school architect was very much aware of the displacing effect on existing staff of the recommended program and considered that an advantage in the development of the new program. In other cases, the strengths of the existing staff were paramount in the program decision. The decision to "build on" or "reform" the existing program can be a potential consideration in the architecture of magnet school planning.

School desegregation architects, consciously or unconsciously, make choices among these nine principles and others, based on their personal values and their vision of what represents quality education. The decision is also strongly influenced by the differential effects that programs have on the intended target of interest, both students and staff. The anticipated impact on the racial balance goals is part of the equation. Often the influence of existing plans in other cities or the ideas of consultants can be seen in program decisions. Finally, the magnet program decisions are shaped both by the interests of the

community and also by the desegregation architect's vision of community needs. In other words, some magnet school programs are not intended to reflect the community as it is, but rather the community as it should be, in the eyes of the desegregation architect. That is, the programs are designed to "stretch" the community by offering educational programs which will create a new community reality. For example, magnet programs that are "high tech" in their design might be located in the largely "smokestack" community to help in the transition of that community to job opportunities in the future.

Once these program decisions are made, however, the second major ingredient in contemporary desegregation planning is the choice or enrollment process for accessing whatever programs are made available.

Organizing Principles of the Choice Process

Just as there are many variations on the magnet school theme, there are also many combinations and permutations of the choice process. How a desegregation architect chooses to design the enrollment process is also a strong reflection of both values and science. Just as many program decisions for magnet schools may have been made without reference to the underlying principles, it is also apparent that enrollment designs in many cases reflect lack of attention to the range of possibilities and consequences. Some of the most important issues of racial equity and desegregation effectiveness relate to the choice process.

1. First Come, First Served Versus Deadline Approach

The most important decision regarding a magnet school enrollment process is a choice between enrolling students on a first come, first served basis or on a deadline basis. As the name denotes, first come, first served enrollment approach gives first enrollment preference to the individual who has either stood in line or in some other way placed his or her application at the top of the list. When this is done on a personal registration basis, it frequently results in long lines of parents standing out in front of schools, sometimes for many hours, and in a few cases days, in order to enroll their child in a popular program. In other cases where applications are considered, lines of individuals processing their applications at a central point are considered on a first come, first served basis; or when applications are mailed to a central point, the first ones opened by those receiving the mail are given consideration above others.

By contrast, the deadline methodology allows individuals to apply over a period of time with the only requirement being that all applications be turned in by a certain time. Sometime after the deadline, they are processed with equal consideration given to each application, regardless of when it was received over the application period.

Those who advocate the first come, first served basis point to the very positive effect on the magnet school program as a whole created by the long lines of waiting parents. Often these lines become parts of news

stories emphasizing the quality of the magnet programs and the number of people who are willing to sacrifice their time and energies in order to enroll in them. It is argued that this publicity has a high-lighting effect upon the entire magnet school program, stimulating interest in enrollment in other sites.

Those who prefer the deadline approach usually argue on behalf of the basic fairness of the approach. It serves the interests and needs not only of those who are willing and able to make the sacrifice of time, but also of those who cannot act on their interest in the program by speedy action or long hours of waiting. Also, those who advocate the deadline approach point out that, not only is it in reality a fairer process, but also it affords a special opportunity for revealing publicly the fairness of the process. By that, I mean that the deadline approach is often coupled with a public determination of who will be allowed to enroll in programs that are oversubscribed. This is frequently done in an auditorium with a computerized random number generator, in the presence of public and press. The first come, first served method does not allow for this possibility. Usually at this public event not only are the students chosen for the program, but also the balance of the applicants are put on a waiting list.

While both approaches have their strong advocates, I believe it is difficult to defend the first come, first served approach on the basic issue of fairness. There are simply those who will have inside information allowing them to get in an early application or who will have the time to sacrifice in a long waiting line. The basic and fundamental question is,

why should these individuals be favored over those who have an equal desire for their child in the program but not an equal access to information or ability to wait in line?

2. Attendance Area Versus City-Wide Enrollment

This attendance area versus city-wide distinction was raised under the issue of program design. Here the issue is revisited in terms of a decision regarding enrollment. Some desegregation architects choose to give preference to the attendance area population in the enrollment in the new magnet program. In other cases, it's decided that enrollment will be available on a city-wide basis without special preference to attendance area populations. There are innumerable variations on this theme, including a phase-out preference system for attendance area populations, as well as the maintenance of an attendance area preference with the requirement that all, including the attendance area population, reapply for the school. The decision on enrollment preference is driven by the values one holds on behalf of the traditional attendance area or neighborhood school concept versus the values associated with giving all in the city an equal opportunity of enrollment. Also a factor in the decision may well be the cost associated with transportation. Obviously, the attendance area preference limits the amount of transportation and, hence, the cost.

3. Entrance Grade Versus All-Grade Enrollment

Some program designs by their nature require enrollment on a developmental basis. Therefore, the primary enrollment is into the entrance grades, and enrollment in higher level grades is not possible at the early stages, or even at mature stages of program development -- except for the unusual case of a child with previous, similar experience in

another setting. Other magnet programs are implemented which allow vacancies at the other grade levels to go unfilled. In this way, waiting lists only have to be managed in terms of one grade level rather than all the grade levels in the school. This decision is also related to the decision on whether individual grades have target enrollment rules applied to them. When programs are run without grade level targets, the capacity of a total school may be absorbed by taking additional students at the entrance grade level rather than filling vacancies at the individual grades. In many cases, the available spaces at other than the entrance grade are filled before the enrollment period by taking applicants off of waiting lists, limiting new applicants to the entrance grade.

4. Transportation Versus Restricted Transportation

The extent and form of transportation offered to parents will have a significant effect on the school enrollment. At the first level, a decision is made whether or not to provide transportation by the school district. In most cases, the decision is usually in favor of providing transportation under rules of eligibility having to do with distance and hazard. Sometimes factors that include improving the racial balance enter into transportation considerations. However, even after the transportation decision is made in favor of the school system's providing transportation support, the type of transportation afforded will have an effect on enrollment. Some districts choose to provide yellow bus transportation, public transit passes, parent contracts, taxi service, or a combination of all of the above. Yellow bus transportation is the conveyance of choice for most parents. Parents' perceptions of convenience and safety are strong factors in the decision to enroll in a particular program requiring transportation.

The type of transportation provided is often related to costs. Public transportation when it is available, is usually less expensive than yellow bus transportation. Also, magnet school plans usually require more costly transportation networks than do mandatory reassignment plans. However, any true assessment of transportation should include not only cost comparisons, but also benefit comparisons. In this way, transportation is evaluated as an investment in the success of the desegregation plan.

5. One Enrollment Choice Versus Multiple Enrollment Choices

In designing the enrollment process, the architect is faced with a decision on whether to afford one choice for enrollment purposes or hold out multiple choice opportunities. The important thing to note from the outset is that whatever the form of initial enrollment communication (that is, whether you begin with a process of offering one choice or a process that offers multiple opportunities for parents to list their enrollment choices in priority order), only one choice can be considered at a time. This fundamental point is often lost both on those who are involved in desegregation architecture, as well as on the parent or court trying to respond to a choice enrollment process. It is not unusual, for example, to see the parent fill out a choice form that has three blanks with the same school name, thinking that somehow that will improve their chances for getting their child enrolled in their school of choice. The differences between the single choice and multiple choice processes are more apparent than real. That is, since only one choice can be considered at a time, the most important determination for the parent or guardian is a first

choice. If, then, that first choice is granted, the information on the additional choices is irrelevant. Moreover, if the vast percentages of individuals get their first choice in school enrollment, then the remainder, whose first choices cannot be satisfied, can be contacted personally regarding the available openings and their additional choices at that point in time. The multiple choice form usually results in the processing of a second choice automatically when a first choice cannot be granted. If the school assignment is made on the basis of that second, third or fourth choice, it is done so without a real knowledge of the depth and extent of interest in the choice. It is not unheard of for parents and guardians to substantially change their minds between the time they apply for a set of magnet school programs and the notification of enrollment. Under circumstances where you are able to grant a very high percentage of parent/guardian first choices for their student's enrollment, it is preferable to contact the parent individually regarding the balance of the choices before any unwarranted assumptions are made with regard to other choices that parents listed under a multiple choice opportunity.

Sometimes restrictions are placed on the choices parents may make. These choices may be limited geographically or by virtue of the race of the student. It is not uncommon to see systems that deny applications from students whose transfer from a school would have a deleterious effect on the racial balance of the sending school. This is an unnecessary restriction at the application stage because a decision on the application can

always be made at a later time. Moreover, an individual transfer that may "violate" a transfer rule might be allowed when the full effects of all transfers are taken into consideration. This tendency to restrict, a priori, certain types of applications is one of the most frequent errors made in desegregation planning.

6. Choice Sequence

When the opportunity for school enrollment is extended by the school system, it may be done in such a manner that parents are forced to jeopardize their child's enrollment in their neighborhood school in order to risk an application to a magnet school. Under a system where all choices are available during a single time period, parents and guardians are often faced with perplexing choices, not only among attractive programs (which I argue is a healthy embarrassment of riches) but also between attendance area and magnet schools. In this situation, the parent is asked to risk a first choice enrollment into a magnet program and lose the priority opportunity they have for enrollment into their attendance area school. This unintended, chilling effect can be eliminated by sequencing the choice process, in some cases allowing parents to indicate at the time they are making a magnet school choice that they are also interested in the attendance area school. The city-wide magnet programs can be held out for first consideration in the choice process. Acceptance or rejection at this stage in no way restricts equal opportunity in the second stage for applying to attendance area schools and receiving whatever priority may exist. Finally, it's not unusual to see a third stage in the process,

an overall transfer stage, that allows an avenue of redress for any residual school assignment dissatisfaction. Where city-wide and attendance area distinctions do not exist in the magnet school plan, this argument on choice sequencing is moot. However, under other designs where city-wide opportunities are given but attendance area preference systems are also intact, this sequencing allows for an unfettered opportunity for magnet school application without loss of equal access to attendance area schools.

7. Enrollment Priority Systems

In the process of deciding priorities among the various applicants, one factor, capacity, is always a consideration. Additionally, it is most often the case that magnet schools operate under a racial balance requirement and, therefore, racial balance becomes the second factor limiting enrollment. Aside from these two considerations, the magnet school architect may well consider an array of other priorities in the enrollment process. For example, enrollment from the immediate attendance or former attendance area may be given priority consideration. Another priority factor may be distance. Those students close to the school are given first consideration over those living further away. Another factor that is sometimes considered is called sibling preference. In some programs, brothers and sisters of students already enrolled are given special consideration upon their application. Also, some schools and grade levels are profiled by male and female categories. Some school districts also consider the status of the sending school in considering who has priority for enrollment into a particular program. Occasionally

in early childhood programs, the older children are given preference over the younger applicants for the program. Some of these priority categories have in common the fact that if the planning architect chooses to use them, it will have a diminishing effect upon the number of applicants who will receive their choice of assignment. For example, employing the male-female balance criteria will reduce the number of students who can be accepted if the applicants fall outside of the acceptable male-female balance range but stay within the overall capacity limitations of the program. Other factors are simply extensions of values. For example, the decision to have a sibling preference is valuing multiple child families over single child families. If you are an only child, or if your family has not enrolled siblings in your school of choice, then your chances of being accepted in a program of choice are statistically not as great as those who have siblings in the program. Therefore, the decision to have a sibling preference policy is a decision in favor of keeping families together at the expense of slightly reducing the changes for families with one child.

The issue of priorities also comes into consideration in the management of a magnet school waiting list. Whatever the district decides is going to be its policy with regard to special priority considerations, that policy needs to be clearly enunciated and repeated in the course of the magnet school enrollment process. If, for example, male-female balance is a part of the consideration, then an individual on the waiting list next in line needs to understand why it is that he or she is being

skipped over in favor of someone lower on the list - that it is not a matter of individual prerogative on the part of whoever is administering the system, but rather a result of the priority system.

8. The Role of Enrollment Capping

Capping or discontinuing enrollment into a magnet program can occur at three different stages in the enrollment process as a consequence of the capacity and racial balance goals of the program, as well as the combination of any priority factors that operate. The first point at which the capping of further enrollment becomes a consideration is at the initial point of enrollment decision-making. If, for example, the enrollment period begins in early spring, at some point in late spring a decision is made regarding the students who will be accepted in the program, and then those not accepted are considered for other enrollment opportunities and frequently are placed on a waiting list for their first choice. It's important to note at this stage that any decisions with regard to enrollments are estimated; that is, it is not unusual for the actual fall enrollment to be not precisely equivalent to the spring projections. The practical relevance of this observation is that you can, if you desire, take more students than your capacity or even your racial balance profile would allow if you understand that the patterns of attrition will work in favor of meeting the ultimate goals. These patterns will become evident for each program over time and can be used as a basis for increasing the number of students accepted in programs without exceeding capacity or violating racial balance goals.

Secondly, at any point in the enrollment process following this initial acceptance, enrollments may be capped when goals are realized. It is not unusual to have vacancies in magnet school programs that exist beyond the initial enrollment point. However, as those initial vacancies are filled by late applicants to the program, there may be some point that is reached when capping is necessary to control the enrollment. Finally, a third stage at which capping might be employed is upon the opening of school and the realization of the actual enrollment. At this stage, decisions can be made about limiting additional enrollment in the program, either because of enrollment capacity, racial balance, or the array of priority factors that have been determined.

The important policy consideration in capping has to do with the analysis of its effects. Obviously, it is desirable to avoid capping if at all possible, so that you are able to grant all the choices for school enrollment. When that is not possible, then it is important to consider the equity effects of the capping decision. That is, the total effect of the capping decision should not disproportionately fall upon one group over another. It is frequently the case that both minority and majority oversubscription exists for a magnet program and a limitation on further enrollment would affect both groups. However, in some circumstances, one group will more disproportionately be affected in order to maintain racial balance requirements for the school. At this point, consideration needs to be given to the overall effect on the entire school system. For example, in the fall of 1985, enrollment in the St. Paul magnet schools resulted in the capping of minority enrollment in five schools and majority

enrollment in thirteen schools. However, the duration of the capping was longer for minority students, and the effect overall was equitable for minority and majority students.

These problems can be very severe in cities with large non-white majorities where large numbers of blacks but a much smaller number of whites apply for magnets.

Issues

This paper began with a discussion of the transition in desegregation planning from plans that relied on mandatory reassignment provisions to contemporary plans relying on magnet schools and the choice process. In considering why this transition in planning approaches took place, I suggest that there are at least four major reasons why contemporary school desegregation planning most often makes use of the choice process and magnet schools.

1. Effectiveness

Plans employing the controlled choice process and the use of magnet or specialty programs (within the framework of mandatory goals) have been remarkably successful in meeting the numeric goals of desegregation. (Stanley, 1983.) For example, beginning in 1977 and for each subsequent year, the Milwaukee Public Schools exceeded the requirements of the court order through their magnet school plan and controlled choice assignment process. (Bennett, 1984.) Presently, the court's requirement in Milwaukee is that 75% of the students attend racially balanced schools. The school system has maintained for a period well past the expiration of the court order approximately 85% of their students in racially

balanced schools. A similar result was realized in the Buffalo school system, when it adopted essentially the same approach that was employed in Milwaukee. (Traub, 1983, p. 18.) More recently, federal district court cases in Yonkers, New York, and San Jose, California, resulted in orders of a magnet school and choice process similar to the design imposed in Milwaukee and Buffalo. Here again, the first year expectations of the court were far exceeded by the results of the district's desegregation efforts.

The success of this approach in meeting court-ordered requirements is attributed to the power exercised in the control of the student assignment process. Traditional desegregation plans employed remedies that were not easily changed from year to year (example: school district boundaries and grade level reorganizations). The desegregation plan employing choice, however, dynamically controls the reassignment process on a year-to-year basis, giving much better leverage on the desegregation goals. This precise control contributes to a second important virtue of this approach to desegregation -- stability.

2. Stability

The desegregation process employing choice and magnet schools has resulted in an amazingly stable situation with regard to the maintenance of the desegregation effort. With traditional desegregation plans it was frequently the case that schools brought into racial balance suffered the loss of that balance over time, as a consequence of enrollment changes that could not be adequately responded to with traditional desegregation techniques. By contrast, the choice process, which exercises yearly control in the student reassignment process, could be expected to make

the fine tuning adjustments necessary on a year-to-year basis to maintain racial balance in already racially-balanced schools. Schools originally racially balanced in Milwaukee in 1977 remain in racial balance in 1987, despite a 23% increase in minority students during the time period.

3. Educational Improvement

An important and clearly intended by-product of the desegregation process which relies on magnet schools and the choice process is the overall improvement in the school system's programs. In other words, the net quality of educational offerings in the school system may be appreciably increased at the same time the district is complying with desegregation requirements. (Blank, 1984, p. 270.) In addition to the improvement of quality, there's greater variety of educational offerings as a consequence of the adoption of this approach, as well as a more equitable access to these programs of choice. All of this goes a long way toward relieving the public impression of desegregation as a punitive enterprise and replacing it with a reality of desegregation as an outstanding opportunity for access to improved educational opportunities in the school system. Traditional desegregation planning makes no special efforts to do anything but meet the required numerical standard of student and staff assignments. By contrast, the system employing magnet school programs and specializations is able to awaken students, staffs, and parents to the possibilities of greater personal opportunity for them and maintain their interest and support for the public school system.

4. Choice

The contribution of the choice aspect of this desegregation process cannot be over-estimated. The presumption is that students and staff who make conscious choices with regard to what school they will be in also make a commitment to public schooling that mimics the emotion underlying the choice of a private school.

Making a choice is not a guarantee that it will be granted. In this respect, it's important to make the distinction between the choice process and the "freedom of choice" or totally voluntary plans that were offered by some southern school districts shortly after the Brown decision. The choice process allows the district and, for that matter, parents, students, and staff, to have the opportunity to exhaust whatever potential there is for voluntary compliance with the order or requirement. In other words, there is a conscious matching of choices with requirements and an effort to grant as many first choices as possible within the constraints of the requirement. In this matching, the choice process has been remarkably successful. For example, in Milwaukee, in 1977 when approximately 108,000 students were assigned schools under the desegregation plan ordered by the federal district court, better than 95% of the first choices that parents made for school assignment were granted, while at the same time meeting the racial balance requirements of the court. (Bennett, 1984, p. 1.) Other districts employing this choice process have had similar experience, even when school closings were not part of the process as was the case in Milwaukee. By contrast,

when traditional desegregation mandatory reassignment provisions are used, such as redistricting, pairing and clustering, they do not take advantage of whatever voluntary movement might have furthered the district in pursuit of the desegregation goals. Because in traditional desegregation planning the assigned school is a district's choice for parents, rather than a parent choice which a district is asked to accommodate, there is a diminished commitment on the parent's part for the assigned school. Despite the virtues of the magnet school and choice process that are espoused by advocates and conceded by critics, there remain predictable issues and criticisms of the magnet school and choice approach that need to be considered and addressed.

1. Elitism

Magnet schools are represented to the public as alternatives but with an implied superiority. (Metz, 1984, p. 22). The accusation is frequently made that magnet schools can be established in a school system in such a way as to create a haven for those already served well in the traditional educational program. Racial isolation may be replaced by socio-economic isolation. This criticism goes on to assert that the individuals injured in the course of the school system's history of segregation are not the primary beneficiaries of the plan where magnet school and specialty programs are designed to appeal exclusively to the academically gifted or where programs can be accessed only through rigorous entrance requirements. Under these circumstances, the charge of elitism is frequently valid.

By contrast, a magnet school design can intentionally be inclusive, both from a standpoint of offering a wide range of programs intended for a broad range of students' interests and abilities, as well as minimizing the number of programs which require the student to meet entrance requirements. (Blank, 1983.) (Doyle, 1984, p. 267.) Under these circumstances, the magnet programs excite the interest and enrollment of students from a wide range of interests and abilities and contribute to a more egalitarian goal.

Without question, and regardless of the design of the program, there are certain parents in any community who are simply better prepared to take advantage of the choice process. This particular unfair advantage is exacerbated by a student enrollment process that insists on a first-come, first-served approach as opposed to a deadline approach (as discussed earlier in this paper). It should also be noted that in the maturation of the magnet school and choice process, some of the initial problems of awareness are overcome. In other words, in the third, fourth, and fifth year of magnet school operation, the community as a whole becomes better informed of the opportunities available and, hence, the access to the range of schools is more equitable.

Recruitment methods that feature information centers, advertisements in the minority press, the cooperation of churches, and targeted efforts by schools can increase the minority representation in magnet programs.

A twist or variation on the criticism of elitism is the accusation that

magnet schools set in motion opportunities for favoritism and a generally unfair approach to student assignment. It may be alleged that the sons and daughters of important community adults, or the children of school system personnel are served above others. The appearance of favoritism can be as damning as the reality. Generally speaking, the best approach to eliminating or reducing community skepticism and assuring the essential fairness of the assignment process is to render that process as public as possible. By this I mean, the mechanics of the assignment process need to be represented ahead of time to the public and then actually conducted in a very public manner. Here again, the first-come, first-served approach does not lend itself to easy public understanding or public monitoring of the assignment process. The first-come, first-served approach tends to reinforce the suspicions that certain important people in the community are served unfairly ahead of others, whether or not this is true.

It is often the issue of waiting lists and how waiting lists are handled that become a matter of considerable contentiousness in regard to magnet school enrollment. Some districts have decided to not operate with waiting lists. Students are accepted in the program in the fall of the year, and the programs are essentially closed for further enrollment until the enrollment processes are reviewed the following year. Most districts, however, that employ the magnet school approach have chosen to maintain an active waiting list from the initial pool of applicants, allowing those applicants to access the program during the year as spaces become available. The next issue they face is whether or not the waiting list will be continued and carried over to the following year. Some districts

choose to disregard the waiting list at the end of the school year and begin the enrollment process anew the following year with those having made application in the first year being required to renew that application. Other districts have chosen to carry over the waiting list as a convenience for parents who are still interested in the program. It is essential at the end of the year that there be another contact with those on the waiting list to determine whether or not these individuals are still interested in the program. Carrying over the waiting list usually results in the enrollment of the waiting list carryovers ahead of new applicants for the program. This information is well received by parents of children on the waiting list and not well received by those who are making new application to the program. Whether or not the district employs a waiting list and how it determines priorities for the waiting list (for example: Will siblings be taken ahead of others even though they are not next in line on the waiting list?) is an essential value question for careful consideration by the school district. There are few clear right or wrong decisions with regard to the administration of waiting lists (unless the administration results in failure to racially balance a school), but in each case the decision of the management of waiting lists should be carefully thought through and then managed in a very honest and public way so that there is not the potential appearance, much less reality, of abuse in their management.

Some special comment needs to be reserved for the philosophy of eligibility with regard to gifted and talented magnet programs. One of the most common magnet school programs used by school districts is one

designed for gifted and talented students. This program has had remarkable success in attracting a relatively large number of students and has also proven to be a program that is a powerful means of changing the racial balance of a particular school. The gifted and talented program is also a frequent target of the elitism critics. The very existence of this kind of magnet program is repugnant to some, particularly those who believe that the appropriate model for gifted and talented education should be that the program be located in each of the schools of the system rather than centering in a single school. When districts operate in such a way as to create gifted and talented education exclusively in a single site, it is indeed contributing to the validity of an elitist criticism. By contrast, many urban school districts operate gifted and talented programs in a single site while at the same time truly supporting the development of programs in all of the schools capable of serving the needs of gifted and talented students such that there is a viable choice for the parents of gifted and talented students between the center and the local school.

However, the major focus of the elitist criticism has to do with the eligibility requirements for the gifted and talented program. The design of a gifted and talented program can intentionally focus exclusively on academic performance or, alternately, can be intentionally designed to identify a wider range of gifted and talented performance, including areas other than academic performance. Taking the latter approach will create a more diverse pool of individuals both from a talent and ethnic

standpoint. The second issue arises with regard to the selection process. Some districts have operated in such a way as to rank order all of the students on some gifted and talented scale, either a single academic scale or multiple scales. This rank order then becomes the basis for selection of students, from presumably the most gifted of the group down the list until the capacity of the program is filled within racial balance requirements. The problems associated with this approach are numerous. First, it suffers from hyperrationality, that is the tendency to believe that the measures employed to identify gifted and talented behavior can separate the performance of those students in such a discrete fashion that lends itself to this kind of interval ranking. At best, the measures frequently employed are capable of creating ordinal kinds of classifications, that is, to separate the qualified from the unqualified. Therefore, the psychometric argument on behalf of this rank ordering cannot be sustained.

However, I think the fundamental problem with some approaches to classifying gifted and talented students is that the sponsors of the program feel that gifted and talented behavior is more due to nurture than nature. In fact, increased evidence suggests that gifted and talented behavior can be taught and that we ought to design the eligibility criteria for programs to serve the needs of gifted and talented students in such a way that we intentionally have a mix of students with different kinds of talents. This suggests a preference for designing the acceptance of students into a gifted and talented program along lines of an eligiblity

pool where once it is determined that the students are eligible for the program, all other rank ordering classification becomes irrelevant. Then a random selection process is employed to take students from this eligibility pool. On this point some criticize this approach because "the most talented" student may not be fortunate enough to be drawn in the random sample. However, if the system truly believes that gifted and talented students are served not only in a gifted and talented center but in all schools, this student has lost access to only one of a number of appropriate choices. Moreover, the remaining students on this waiting list can be carried over to the next year without problem in comparing them to the new applicants for the program; since they were equally qualified to enter the program previously, the assumption of their qualification prevails into the second year.

In conclusion, the dropping of entrance requirements, the creation of magnets of wide interest, the use of the deadline approach, and the maturation of the process over time all work to significantly reduce, if not totally eliminate, the criticism of elitism in the magnet school and choice process approach to desegregation.

2. Skimming

The term skimming refers to the fear that within the total school system, certain schools, notably the popular magnet programs, will pull or skim the most talented students from other schools in the system, rendering the non-magnet schools as places without the necessary constituency to be successful. (Perrone, 1985.) In particular, the criticism is

sometimes heard that magnet schools have attracted all the "student leaders" out of schools where otherwise they would have had greater opportunities to lead, and, secondly, where those leadership skills were badly needed.

Any thorough examination of the criticism of skimming needs to begin by dismissing an early assumption. It is too often the assumption that students who are in magnet schools would otherwise be in the non-magnet schools of the public school system. Experience would suggest that this is frequently not the case. For example, when the previous school of attendance was determined for a sample of twenty-five minority students attending an attractive high school magnet program in Milwaukee, only four of the students were previously enrolled in the public school system of the district. The balance attended either private schools or were otherwise new students to the district. It is suggested that magnet schools are drawing not only from the population who might have attended area schools in the public system, but also from a population that otherwise would not have been part of the public school system at all. This suggests an important area that has not been researched; that is, determining the extent to which the whole of the magnet enrollment is greater than the sum of its parts. Magnets draw some students who were at one point actually enrolled in private schools and were attracted into public schools. More often they hold students who would be in private education or whose parents would have made another residential choice to be in another public school system were it not for the availability of attractive magnet school programs.

This effect is strongly suggested by an examination of a school system that initially opened a single alternative school. In 1972 the Milwaukee Public Schools opened an alternative middle school "open education" program. All of those in the system were surprised when three thousand application forms arrived for a school that was targeted to open with four hundred students. Teachers of the students who were chosen for enrollment in the program commented that these students and their parents had no idea of what "open education" was but rather the parents were providing escape for their children from the traditional junior high program in the district.

Beginning in 1976, minority students were provided the opportunity under a new provision of Wisconsin law to transfer from Milwaukee to cooperating suburban school districts on a voluntary basis. In examining the background of applicants for transfer at the 9th grade level to a popular suburban high school, it was noted that most of the names were not on the public school data file (of fifteen students, only three were on the data file as attending a public school). These private school students were on paper enrolled in the public school system over the summer in order to qualify for eligibility to enroll in the suburban school system. At least with respect to this group, it would be ludicrous to argue skimming, or a "brain drain" on the urban public school system from the loss of these students, since literally they were not in the system to begin with. The options brought them into public education.

There is not yet proof that magnet schools attract a large segment of enrollment that otherwise would not be in the public schools. This is

an important researchable question. Such research, carefully conducted, might answer whether this phenomenon is an insignificant anomaly or a significant factor in the enrollment of magnet schools.

However, in assuming that some students, including talented students, are enrolled in magnet schools in lieu of attendance in a public non-magnet school, the effects of this redistribution can be minimized by some of the same factors that were introduced earlier in response to the elitism challenge. In other words, if there is a significant distribution of magnet programs without entrance criteria and with a program intentionally designed to be diverse and attractive to a wide range of students, the magnet school programs are developed with student body profiles more alike than different from the traditional non-magnet school student profile. In the case of high schools, some districts have consciously designed specializations so that literally all of the high schools in the city participate in the magnet school process. Also, it may be the case that attendance area schools are inspired to make themselves and their programs more attractive in the environment of competition with attractive magnet school programs, such that there is a genuine feeling that all who are in the school system boat rise on the tide of improvement.

3. Burden

A third argument cited in criticism of magnet school and choice programs is the belief that a disproportionate burden of desegregation responsibility is placed on minority students and parents. (Heutschke, 1985, p. 151.)

Without question, the institution of the choice process in desegregation planning results in a very different pattern of choice on the part of various ethnic groups. While not taking the time here to develop this analysis in detail, the generalizations that can be safely drawn are that whites and Hispanics tend disproportionately to choose their attendance area school for enrollment purposes, while blacks have a much greater propensity for choosing to attend schools other than their predominantly black attendance area school. For example, in Milwaukee, looking over a long period of time at the choice patterns, black parents were nine times more likely to choose a school other than their neighborhood school than were white or Hispanic parents. Therefore, if all of these first choices were granted, it would have had the inevitable effect of reassigning, by virtue of the choices their parents made, many more black students to predominantly white schools than the reverse. Those without background and knowledge of this persistent propensity conclude, erroneously, that the differential in assignment based on this choice is an example of burden visited on the victims of the previous segregation. Also, it is the case that some spokespersons who are not sympathetic to the goals of school desegregation, as well as others who prefer alternative means of desegregation, have intentionally misrepresented this circumstance and turned it to their own advantage. (Hess, 1984, p. 143.)

It is a fair expectation of a school district's implementation of the desegregation plan that the district equitably balance the "true

desegregation burden." The "true desegregation burden" in a choice process is the assignment of students to schools other than those chosen as a first choice by their parents. In other words, the mandatory back-up provisions of a controlled choice assignment process, where the school district must make the decision on assignment because the parents' request cannot be accommodated, ought to be implemented equitably. With regard to the likely impact of this approach, the research of Professor Christine Rossell is insightful. (Rossell, 1975, pp. 675-95.) In summary, she concludes that the mandatory reassignment of whites will predictably result in significant avoidance (flight) from the system and a reduction of the system's total amount of interracial exposure. The best public policy, however, requires the equal distribution of burden despite the consequence. However, this recommendation makes practical sense only in an environment where the vast majority of school assignment is a result of granting parents their first choice. In this environment the avoidance by both majority and minority parents of mandatory assignment is minimal. By contrast, traditional desegregation plans that rely exclusively on mandatory reassignment measures suffer extremely deleterious effects from avoidance of the assignment school. (Wilson, 1985, p. 152.)

Desegregation plans using magnet schools and the choice process suffer the criticism of their success. Unfortunately, our country has been inured to the view of desegregation as calamity. This is reinforced in

tabloids depicting the violent resistance to desegregation orders. In reality, of course, most desegregation has ultimately proceeded peacefully in most communities. (Orfield, 1983.) In particular, the magnet school/choice process plans have enjoyed a high degree of public acceptance.

There are legitimate criticisms of this approach to school desegregation. In the realm of social policy, good people frequently disagree. There is probably no arena of school policy more fraught with differing opinion and emotion than school desegregation. Anyone involved in the architecture of desegregation plans is inevitably subject to criticism from the left, right, and all political points inbetween. Accusations of social engineering, racism, and burden are common epithets hurled at most desegregation planners at one time or another. It becomes the task of the desegregation architects to understand the law, science, and art of desegregation planning to fashion the plans best suited to local circumstance. In that pursuit, the community can be true participants in the desegregation planning process. (McNeely, 1983, p. 175.) The community can be the best source of ideas and responses to magnet program concepts. They can work side by side with school staffs in the creation of better programs to serve children. This very intimate partnership in the desegregation planning between school staff and the community is typical of plans which rely on the magnet school and choice process. (Blank, 1984.)

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